Fairbury's Interesting 100 Year History Revealed

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St. Johns Catholic Church Founded In 1857

The Roman Catholic congregation of Fairbury was organized about 1857, and was visited semi annually by the Rev. B. Lonergan of Wilmington, until 1867, when the mission was attached to Pontiac, a resident priest having been appointed there. This priest, whose name was O'Neill was one of the oldest priests in America, and the first Irish priest to ever come west of the Alleghanies. It is believed that Fairbury was served by him a very short time. Following Fr. O'Neill was Rev. Thomas Quigley who served the Fairbury Community until 1868. Rev. Quigley recorded his first Baptism, a child with the name of LaBonte. An older parishioner recalls having been told the first child baptized, was that of a family traveling west in a covered wagon. This could possibly have been the La Bonte child. The first Fairbury resident baby recorded baptized was John Eddy, late husband of Mrs. Nellie Eddy.

The congregation, however, had not assumed any permanent organization until 1868 at which time, the Pastor who was Rev. John A. Fanning, decided to establish residence here because he thought Fairbury was such a growing community and Pontiac was not.

A frame church was built on the corner of Hickory and Jackson Sts. It was a 33X60 ft. structure and cost about $4,000. The rectory is still standing and is occupied by the Herbert Fehr family. The original membership consisted of some 30 families, and in 1878 had increased to 125 families, of whom the majority were section hands and miners. Very few farmers.

At this time Fr. Fanning also served Strawn parish. His means of travel being by horseback. A man by the name of John Carroll was caretaker of the horse.

The church edifice was dedicated to St. John the Baptist on the 24th of June, the year not known.

The small organ which was used in this church is still in existance. The choir consisted of Winefred Keeley, Mrs. Anna (Salmon) McAllister, and Mrs. John Eddy.

Following Rev. Fanning, as pastors, were Rev. Patrick Lyons, Aug. 1882-1884, Rev. Peter Owens, Feb. 1884-Jan. 1892, Rev. J. H. Quinlan, Feb. 1892 - May 1894, Rev. Patrick Dillon, July 1894 - July 1900, and Rev. James Francis, July 1900 - Dec. 1910. It was during Rev. Francis' service, it was decided to build a new church. The cornerstone was laid in 1902 and it was dedicated on Nov. 9, 1902. The lots for this church were purchased from Miss Jeanette Moore at the price of $1900. In 1901 there were 78 contributors and in 1910 there were approx. 90 contributors.

Following Fr. Francis was the Rev. Peter Shudy. He served the parish from 1910 to 1915. On Jan. 28,

1913, the first Nuptial High Mass was said in this church, for Bessie Mowery and Mattie L. Nolan by Rev. Shudy.

Rev. S. E. Aut served from June 1915 to July 1927. Rev. V. J. Griffin from July 1927 - June 1933. Rev. George Schramm from June 1933 to June 1937 and Rev. S. F. Kubiak from June 1937 to June 1955. Fr. Kubiak was the only pastor, to date, who passed away while serving in Fairbury. It is a great honor, that he chose our parish cemetery for his resting place. Rev. Wm. Boucher was appointed to serve here in June 1955. Only one former Pastor, Fr. Schramm, is still living.

Our oldest living parishioner is Mrs. Nellie Eddy who will be 84 in Sept. She was baptized, received first Holy Communion, was confirmed, and was married in the same parish, which is very unusual.

The oldest known marker in St. Johns cemetery was dated in 1873. Although there have been burials there before that date, there are no records of them.

The information for this article was taken from the church records and also from the History of Livingston County.

(Dedication and History taken from issue of November 14, 1902)

Dedication of St. John's Church.

With solemn rites and impressive ceremonies St. John's new Catholic church in this city was dedicated Sunday. The day was a beautiful one and hundreds of people were in attendance. Every pew in the church was filled and the aisles were crowded with people standing and even then a large number of people were unable to gain admission.

Bishop Spaulding of Peoria was to have dedicated the church but was unable to be present owing to the fact that he was appointed a member of the arbitration committee by President Roosevelt to settle the mine difficulties.

Right Rev. Bishop J. J. O'Riley of Peoria came in his stead and dedicated the church being assisted in the services by the priest in charge, Father Francis, and celebrant. M. Weldon, Bloomington; Deacon, J. J. Burk, Bloomington; Chaplains to the bishop, P. Lyons, Pontiac; M. Ryan, Piper City; Sub deacon, J. Quinn, Chatsworth; Master of Ceremonies, M. J. O'Callaghan, Chenoa. The church was beautifully decorated with potted plants and cut flowers. The choir assisted by Laughran's orchestra sang very beautifully "Wilgrand's Festival Mass." Solos were sung by Miss Elizabeth Laughran, Peter Somers of Bloomington and Ignatius Heckman.

Following the dedication Auxiliary Bishop O'Riley delivered the dedicatory address taking for his subject "The Moral Effects of Christianity." He spoke for upwards of an hour and held the interest of

the large audience throughout. He spoke of the history of the Catholic church in the past and of the good which had been accomplished by the church and the good it was doing at present. He told of the magnificent edifice which stood as monuments to Christ far grander and lasting than all monuments erected to man. He paid a glowing tribute to the zealous and faithful work of Rev. Father Francis thru whose untiring efforts the church was accomplished and congratulated the people for the noble and hearty response given to the efforts of their priest.

In the evening Rev. J. J. Burk spoke on “The Triumphs of Religion” to an audience fully as large as the previous one. He delivered a very interesting sermon which was enjoyed by all present. Ignatius Heckman sang a solo in a very fine voice.

The new church is a beautiful one both interior and exterior. The building is situated on the corner of Ash and fourth streets facing south. It is 40X50, brick with slate roof and has a tower on the southeast corner. The interior is finished in dark green solid, touched here and there with fresco. The cost of the church was $14,000.

Memorial windows in memory of the following departed adorn the new edifice; Casper Egges, by Theodore and Alvin Egges, also Casper Egges, by Mary Elizabeth and Teresia Egges; in the memory of the departed members of the Edward Harrington’s family, by the living; John F. O’Brien by his children, James and Mary Ann. Anthony Glinnen, by Dennis Glinnen; Mrs. James Harrington by James Harrington and family; Mrs. Thomas Winslow, by living members of deceased family; John McGreal and family; Mr. and Mrs. William Moran; Allen and Helen Wernsman in memory of Robert Barry.

History of Catholic Church

The Roman Catholic congregation was organized about 1857 and was visited from that time semi-annually by Rev. B. Lonergan, of Wilmington, until 1867, when the mission was attached to Pontiac, a resident priest having been appointed there. The priest, whose name was O’Neil, was one of the oldest priests in America, the first Irish priest who ever came west of the Alleghenies, and was succeeded by Rev. Thomas Quigley. The congregation, however, had not assumed any permanent organization until 1868, when, under the leadership of Rev. John A. Fanning a frame church was built, 33 by 60 feet, to which important additions were made, at a total cost of about 4,000.

The original membership consisted of some thirty families, but has increased fourfold and over. The church edifice was dedicated on June 24, to St. John the Baptist, by Rev. G. Gonaut, of Chebanse, assisted by the pastor and other clergyman. The Sunday school of this church was organized cotemporaneously with the congregation. Its first superintendent was Owen McKay, who later went to Cheyenne, Wyo.

Rev. J. J. Francis took charge of the work in this parish July 15, 1900. He has labored with an earnestness and zeal which brings results. His earnestness was communicated to the members of the church and one of the first outward results is the fine new church. He has worked hard to accomplish this result and Sunday had the pleasure of seeing his ambitions realized. Father Francis is beloved by the members of his church and has many friends among the people of this city and vicinity. Of the original members of the church the following are still living in this parish: Dennis Glinnen, Chris Glinnen, Mathew Glinnen, Thomas Winslow, James Harrington, Edward Harrington, Jerimiah Sullivan, Patrick Sullivan, Mrs. Haverty, William Moran, Mrs. Ann Moran, Mrs. B. Barry, Patrick Curren, P. F. Sommers, John Daily, Mrs. Lawrence Keeley, John McGreal and Stephen Eddy.

Much disappointment was felt on account of Bishop Spaulding being unable to be present, and Father Francis is going to try to arrange for him to give a lecture in the near future.

Transcribed by: **Dale C. Maley**

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